

Clear The Decks

The Metaphor

Clear The Decks is an apt metaphor for the Character First process at Hyde School. The Hyde family name was long associated with deep water shipbuilding on the Kennebec River. On various types of sailing ships, there were decks such as the fore deck, the main deck, the quarter deck and the poop deck. The decks were the centers of daily life. Cooking, washing, repairing sails and leisure activities all occurred on the decks. They were cluttered with people, tools and materials. To prepare for military action, foul weather or difficult maneuvers, the orders would go out to first "clear the decks", and then rig for action. Serious business required the sailors to put away anything they might trip over.

The Process

Clear The Decks is an activity to bring forth hidden agendas, to replace private conversations, to voice nonproductive nagging worries and to recognize those in crisis. Like the clutter on sailing ships, these issues are all obstacles or symptoms of obstacles that we could otherwise trip over on the path of personal growth.

Clear The Decks is an important activity in the Character First process. It is one structured way in which we apply the principles of Conscience, Truth, Humility and Brother's Keeper. To use Clear The Decks effectively, we must first think of how our words will help ourselves and others to live by these principles.

To properly balance the time spent in Clear The Decks, we should also remember three of the four principles are ones we must primarily seek in our own lives. Only one of four explicitly requires encouragement of others. That is about the right ratio for time spent on Clear The Decks issues.

Stick To The Agenda

Clear The Decks is an early agenda item for regional meetings because it is essential to the operation of the region. However, it should not deflect meetings from their agenda. Its purpose is to primarily raise issues rather than wrestle with them or try to resolve them during this part of the meeting. Clear The Decks issues arise from conscience and if we speak directly from our conscience, the issues are not debatable on that level. Such issues typically give rise to emotional responses, but no time is allowed for responses. However, the group may decide to set a specific date or forum such as a Concern Meeting for follow up action. Follow up action is often required by the individuals involved.